



Northwest Indian Treatment Center Patients Build "Medicine Wheel Garden"

A new native plant garden at Northwest Indian Treatment Center was designed to help reconnect patients to their cultural heritage, to educate them about nutritional and medicinal uses of plants and to build relationships and a sense of stewardship for the land they belong to.



"Our new native plant garden is the outcome of an evolving dream," NWITC Director June O'Brien said. "Many of our patients were taught about plant medicines in their youth; others want to learn."

"As the patients care for the nurturing and healing plants, they, too, are nurtured. Suddenly, one will remember how a plant was used by a grandparent and another will remember the Indian name. Something about themselves is validated."

"On a practical level, they also gain confidence that they can identify plants and know how to use them. They learn that food and medicine and cosmetics are possibilities within each plant with the difference only in the preparation."

"I watched them constructing the garden, calling to each other and coming to each other's aid – functioning like a community, an Indian community. It was fantastic!"

"The patients at NWITC unanimously decided on a medicine wheel design for the garden. Several of them talked about how the plants were teachers and helped them to remember the knowledge their grandparents, aunts, uncles or even par-

ents had taught them," said Herbalist/Native Plant Specialist Elise Krohn. "Having a garden brings in the wild forces of nature such as birds, butterflies, insects and, of course, the spirit of the plants," she said.

The botanical program, initiated last year, took root immediately. The center soon outgrew the original beds, so a second garden was added this spring.

"We started planning this year's garden on March 4th at the first inkling of spring's arrival," Elise said.

"I started class that day by talking about spring edibles such as nettle and dandelion. We shared nettle soup and nettle tea. We went outside to identify dandelions and patients were invited to take time to sit with the plant, taste it and open up all their senses to what a dandelion is. Most patients said what they would really like to know about the dandelion is how to get rid of it! But as time went on, we also discussed dandelion medicine. Dandelion moves things in the body, from the liver to the kidneys and cleanses the blood. After talking about its history, nutritive value and medicinal uses, patients were in awe that one pesky plant could have so many uses!"

Most of March and early April were spent planning the design of the garden. The patients wanted to have oyster shells on walkways which were graciously provided by the Squaxin Island Tribe's Salish Seafoods Company.



Six garden themes were created including



sections for the nervous system, the immune system, first aid, kitchen herbs, sacred herbs and edible flowers.

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